

23 JULY 1988

PRICE 10p

Hello lolly! at the city tech

NOTTINGHAM'S CITY TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE continues its grubby trundle towards the launch-pad. Following Mr Djanogly's founding £1m (he is now chairman of the board of trustees and the college has been named after him), plus £250,000 from the Tory-controlled city council (mere rent for community facilities, apparently), news appeared in the *Evening Post* on 1st July of a £50,000 donation from Marks and Spencer for a computer study centre. According to the *Post*, M & S director David Sieff said that "the city technology colleges were something of a hot potato but he felt it was important for companies like his to be involved in education".

And not only education, as the latest issue of *Labour Research* reveals. In the year before the 1987 General Election, M & S gave an identical sum of £50,000 to a shadowy organisation called British United Industrialists which, since its foundation in 1948, has passed on most of its money to the Conservative Party. A hot potato? Nonsense! Like the CTC, BUI is a neatly laundered way of giving money to a Conservative cause without seeming to. In fact, the pitch in the *Evening Post* was pure Telethon, with beaming Mr Sieff, beaming Mr Djanogly and beaming Brian Barwell, M & S's Nottingham manager, brandishing an outsize cheque over their heads like football hooligans waving a scarf.

Vulgarity & dependency

Need I say that this appeared on the *Post*'s Business page? Such is the commercialised vulgarity and sycophantic dependency which the enterprise culture has brought to our education system.

There was worse. On June 24th, the *Post* picked up (without acknowledgment) a story from the *Times Education Supplement* that the Nottingham CTC will refuse to recognise any of the six teachers' unions and insist on a no-strike clause in contracts of employment (though membership of a union will still be allowed). What the *Post* did not make clear but the *TES* did is that, so far at least, Nottingham is out on its own in this respect. Kingshurst CTC in Solihull, the first CTC to open, has imposed no such conditions.

A clue to the Nottingham attitude lies in the ideology of John Ramsden, project director of the CTC and originator of the no union/no strike proposal. Mr Ramsden has no background in education but, according to the *TES*, is "a Sheffield-based business consultant".

"Mr Ramsden," the article continued, "said he was making the recommendations because of the way teacher unions had behaved over the years. The profession had been 'bedevilled' by industrial



action and unions always jockeying for position, against the interests of pupils..."

This, I suppose, is the sort of ignorant one-sided view of the complexities of recent teachers' disputes which might be expected from a "business consultant". It also shows a very Thatcherite urge to win (as someone once put it) 24 nil, for, given the explicitly right-wing ideology of the CTCs, does Mr Ramsden seriously think many (or any) of his staff will be the sort to down chalk at a flick of Fred Jarvis's eyebrow?

Any lingering scruples over the loss of trade union rights will doubtless be assuaged by the little financial arrangements reported in the *TES* on July 8th:

"The country's first purpose-built technology college, due to open in Nottingham in September next year, is offering massive inducements to attract senior teachers, including first-class rail

travel plus relocation costs of up to £7,000.

"The incentives are being offered to applicants for five senior posts at the Djanogly CTC in Nottingham ...

"The CTC is offering unprecedented housing and relocation costs for a Midlands-based state school. All newly-appointed staff moving into the area will be entitled to 100 per cent removal costs, legal and estate agency fees, plus a fixed cost of up to 5 per cent of their annual salaries.

"In addition, a member of staff who is unable to find accommodation, and is compelled to live apart from his or her family, can claim up to £60 a week for up to six months, plus first-class rail fare home once a fortnight.

"These payments are subject to a £7,000 limit, but that excludes travel costs.

"In addition, the burden of housing costs will be eased for the first three years of employment, with 100 per cent of mortgage interest paid in the first year, tapering to 25 per cent in the third year."

No wonder the *TES* headlined the report: "CTC

offers 'golden hello' deal".

To end on a personal note. It has been estimated that the government will be pouring at least £8m into each CTC. Next year, meanwhile, my daughter's primary school will be feeling the effects of a mini-bulge in the birth rate. To meet this, the county education authority is quite properly supplying an extra teacher. Unfortunately, his or her services won't be employed in the obvious way, by creating an extra class, because there is no extra classroom. The solution, of course, is a temporary, mobile classroom. But these are now the responsibility of the Department of Education and Science (the government) and not the local education authority - and the DES won't supply one. So next year my daughter's class size goes up from 23 to 34 - an increase of nearly 50 per cent.

That is why, when I see a photograph of madly smiling, zloty-flapping Messrs Sieff, Barwell and Djanogly, I could cheerfully throw up all over their crisply laundered, jumbo-sized Midland Bank cheque. ■

The hard left and the soggy middle

In a crowded eight days of the Labour leadership battle, Nottingham saw visits by Tony Benn and John Prescott, and a one-day conference, addressed by Sharon Atkin and Ken Livingstone, of supporters of the Benn/Heffer campaign. Following last issue's report on the Tony Benn meeting, here is a personal view of the other two events.

JOHN PRESCOTT IS A GODSEND to the soft left. Faced with a terrifyingly clear-cut choice between deliquescent right and coagulating left, they can now settle for the soggy middle: vote Kinnock to show their loyalty, responsibility, new realism etc.; vote Prescott to show they're really quite critical of the leadership and won't take too much revisionism lying down (they will, though).

(I write not in mockery, incidentally, but with a dreadful sense of the fence collapsing under me - will I too vote Kinnock/Prescott?)

In fact, quite apart from his escape clause value, John Prescott is not such a bad bet in his own right, at least for the deputy leadership as he's trying to redefine it. I went to hear him at the ICC on July 11th and was more impressed than I'd expected. Introduced somewhat oleagiously by John Peck, who didn't exactly rub his hands together but smiled very reminiscently of cats and cream, Prescott took this small meeting of 30 or 40 by the scruff of the neck and battered it into some sort of appreciation, rather as grass agrees to be flattened by a hurricane.

Small, chunky, dark, round-headed, with thick slanting eyebrows verging on the diabolic, four inches of pale blue cuff thrusting ambitiously from his dark blue suit and a workaholic gabble which sometimes topples fatally into the Spoonerism, he'd make a wonderfully energetic tank engine in a children's story. Not Thomas, though - he's too much of a heavy (but coming on nicely: "You'll notice I've learned to smile", and, yes, it wasn't a bad imitation).

But let's not be unfair. John the Tank Engine is a thoroughly admirable invention, hard-working, knowledgeable, articulate, a committed socialist (he used that old-fashioned word on numerous occasions, with straightforward examples of the kind he thinks we should be putting across to the voters). If elected, he would bustle up and down the branch lines shunting all the trains into proper order, making sure they ran efficiently, economically and on time, and generally doing splendid things for the organisation of the Labour Party. He believes in rank and file involvement - in making policy as well as communicating it - and clearly thrives on the sort of grass roots meeting we were having at the ICC. If he were elected, there would be no question of the deputy leader being a remote figure in the constituencies.

What also impressed me was that, at this meeting of party members (though not necessarily on more public occasions), he was completely lacking in the usual politician's evasiveness - which Benn is by no means free from. Questions were met head on and given an honest answer, and if there were doubts (on Irish policy, for example) he admitted them.

My biggest reservation concerns not the nuts and bolts of organisation - the platform on which he's standing and which he would do well - but the wider role of the deputy leader. That same week, as it happened, in Neil Kinnock's absence (the chequered tour of Southern Africa), the constituencies' least favourite son, Roy Hattersley, performed notably well at the despatch box, registering two rare knockouts on Margaret Thatcher, on the cost of the poll tax in the by-election constituency of Kensington, and on the government's equivocation over funding the nurses' pay settlement. Like him or loathe him, old Pigby achieved something which has consistently eluded Neil Kinnock. Benn, I'm sure, could manage it. I'm

not so sure about John Prescott - or, for that matter, Eric Heffer, cuddly old fundamentalist though he is. ■

KEN LIVINGSTONE was once described as a "charming snake". The charm was well in evidence when he came to the People's College on 16th July to talk to a Benn/Heffer campaign conference; the snake was only hinted at (more of that later). Ken gives a lovely performance. The audience being smallish, he rejected the platform and the PA system and sat with us gathered round him in a charmed circle, nonchalant and relaxed in jeans and pale blue open-necked shirt, light brown imitation (surely?) leather jacket draped over his chair back, face bland, with just a touch of wiliness in the hooded eyelids, moustache lifting ever so slightly with amusement from time to time - his wit, with his laconic delivery and professional timing, is one of his greatest political assets, effectively disabling the right-wing media stereotype that hard lefties, by definition, have no sense of humour.

And, of course, he can rattle. He talked fluently for over half an hour without notes on the collapse in about a year's time, if not of capitalism, then at least of the present government's economic policy. He was particularly eloquent on the export of capital and the run-down of the manufacturing sector in favour of service industries, which meant an inevitable balance of payments crisis because no country had ever exported more than 20% of its services. One solution would be to give the workforce control over how profits were invested, so that the capital could be put to better use in this country. In fact, talk of nationalisation and privatisation was largely a red herring: what was important was not ownership but control, and an incoming Labour government could take steps to assert economic control without having to renationalise everything. In any case, a distinction should be made between less important industries and those which were strategically vital, like British Telecom, which should be brought into social ownership straight away.

Soft left "grotesque"

Where the Benn/Heffer campaign was concerned, Ken predicted the collapse of the soft left as the leadership moved further to the right, leaving them nowhere to go. As an example of how grotesque the soft left's position now was, he quoted David Blunkett voting at the NEC for spending more on conventional weapons - the leadership's trade-off for getting rid of nuclear weapons - which meant Blunkett was actually voting to spend more on defence than Margaret Thatcher.

It was an absorbing performance, but the audience, more Trotskyite than Labour Party, was naturally unimpressed, accusing Ken at one point of not offering socialism at all but nationalism. The credibility of his critics was somewhat damaged, however, by a bitter slanging match between the RCP and the SWP over precisely which headline had or had not appeared on the front page of the *Socialist Worker*. This seemed to have little to do with socialism either, but, in a week in which I attended three meetings - Benn, Prescott and this one - it was the most authentic



note of political passion I heard, underlining that what the left really enjoys is not fighting the Tories but slagging off each other.

Some points of interest to emerge from the conference. Sharon Atkin, speaking at the morning session, revealed that her ten-hour hearing before the Labour Party's National Constitutional Committee had cost her £2,000 in legal fees. And (good news or bad for Nottingham East?) she seemed to be saying that she no longer wanted to be a parliamentary candidate, though I've read the contrary in the press.

Sharon also talked about a new left grouping, originating at the Chesterfield Conference, called Women for Socialism, and it was decided to form a Nottingham branch. This decision was made at a lunchtime "women only" meeting (children allowed but no men). It can be hard work being a left-wing male: after lunch there were reports back from the morning workshops at which a woman speaker from the workshop on women's liberation observed scathingly that no men had been there, which was typical of men on the left, and she invited them to join the picket of *Page Three Girls* at the Theatre Royal that evening.

Finally, back to Ken. Point one. Ken said he will not pay the poll tax which, of course, was what his questioners wanted to hear: this being a hard-left conference, everyone was very much in favour of non-compliance.

Point two. Ken spoke about the enormous expansion of the internal security services and how far their tentacles spread (there was another favourable mention for *A Very British Coup*, which is rapidly acquiring icon status on the left). When the Blair Peach campaign finally got access to Special Branch files on the case, they found details of what everyone had said at every meeting of the support group of five or so people during the whole of its seven year existence.

Was this true, or was Ken being viperous? Given that the Special Branch might do this (and everyone by now was grinning nervously at everyone else, and I was glad I wasn't taking notes), would they be stupid enough to leave evidence of

it in the files? (Extreme diligence and extreme stupidity are not, of course, incompatible.) Or might it have been deliberate, to produce precisely the effect it was now producing? As Ken said, the left has no alternative to conducting its affairs in the open.

But is he a Special Branch mole (or viper)? ■

Surreal city!

MY HEART GOES OUT to those poor souls whose job it is to turn our dowdy old town into a tourist attraction. Thirty or forty years ago, maybe; but so much has disappeared since then that it's rather like promoting Milton Keynes as a nice bit of unspoilt countryside.

The problem originates from long before the present recession made us desperate for alternative sources of income, however improbable. In those days, the last thing the city fathers thought Nottingham would ever have to do was sell itself. Its products, yes, but tarding itself up for visitors - that was the sort of thing you saw on Forest Road.

So, they worked busily at ensuring that Nottingham was thoroughly up-to-date and had as many hideous new buildings and traffic schemes as anywhere else. When it was inner ring roads and office blocks, we had Maid Marian Way and Toll House Hill; when it was shopping centres and wholesale redevelopment, we had the Victoria and Broad Marsh Centres and the Meadows and St Ann's.

Huge chunk lost

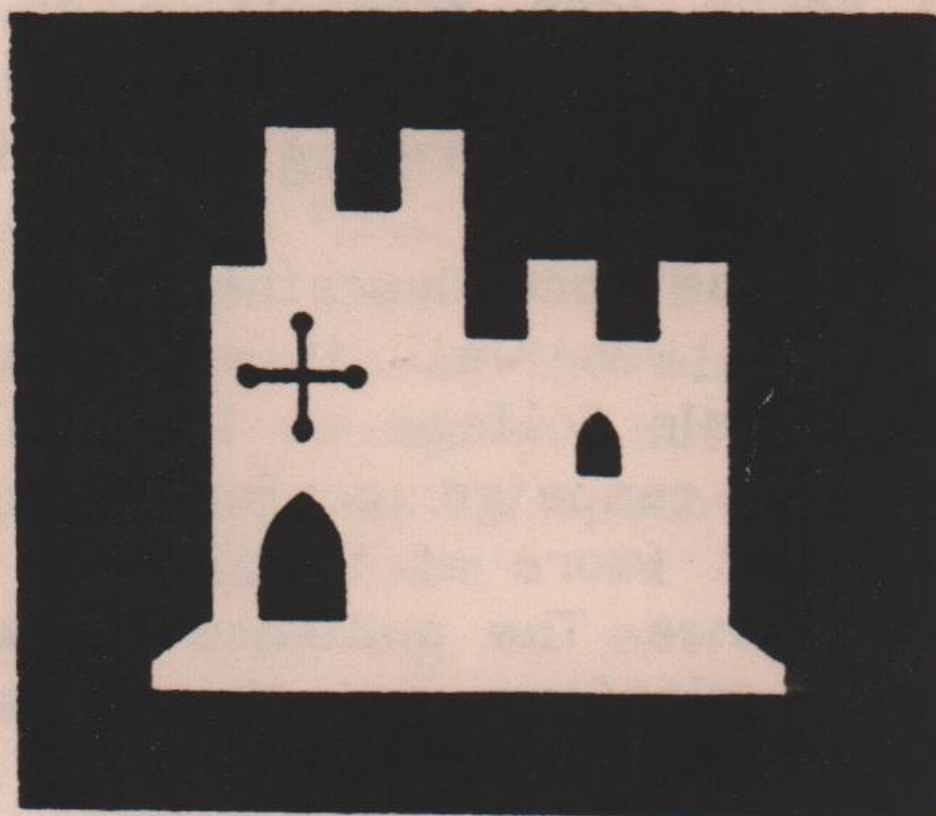
In the process, we lost a huge chunk of the historic, mainly Georgian area between the Market Square, the Castle and the Lace Market, the very area which, if the old buildings had survived, would now be the hub of the tourist trade.

The latest slam of the stable door is a proposal for a Tourism Development Action Programme, or TDAP, in which the English Tourist Board would lead our local authorities in a three year package of development, marketing and research initiatives. The ETB would contribute £50,000, the city and county councils £300,00.

A "Position Statement" on the proposed TDAP published recently is as upbeat as you would expect, though here and there reality breaks through. There is schizophrenia, for example, over just how Nottingham comes over to the outside world. On page 1, we learn that "Nottingham generally speaking does not appear to have a very identifiable image and is often regarded as just another industrial city in the Midlands". By page 11, however, things have improved and "Nottingham is an historic town with a very strong character and identity".

By and large, the latter view seems to prevail, and this is the chief weakness in what is otherwise a thoughtful, even heroic, attempt to do the implausible. Permeating the entire approach to tourism in Nottingham, and not just in this report, is a misguided attempt to present the city as "historic".

There is even going to be a sign on the M1 directing visitors to the "Historic City of



Nottingham". This presumably evades the trades description legislation on the grounds that it is technically accurate if morally hollow. In tourist terms, a historic city is York, Warwick and Chester. It is not Birmingham, Nottingham or even Leicester, which is much older than Nottingham and has hung on to a few more remains, with its Roman ruins and medieval Guildhall (Nottingham allowed the Great Central Railway to knock down its own medieval Guildhall, described by Pevsner, on pictorial evidence, as "gorgeous").

In a less hyperbolic moment, the report concedes that Nottingham is merely "a lively and attractive town with strong historical and literary associations" - though I wonder whether "strong literary associations" isn't laying it on a bit thick: Lawrence and Byron, the chief literary figures with local connections, both lived well out of town and left little of Nottingham in their writings.

And, of course, there is the perennial Robin Hood: "The main weakness of Nottingham as a tourist centre," says the report, "is the lack of a major Robin Hood visitor centre in or close to the City Centre", which, being translated, means: "Apart from the name, Nottingham has no demonstrable connection with Robin Hood at all, so we'd better invent one quick."

I wish them luck, if only because, to declare an interest, it might increase sales of my own booklet on Robin Hood.

Meanwhile, curious "white on brown" tourism signposts are sprouting in the city with those simplistic logos which look as if they've got lost on their way to a Noddy book. At the junction of Maid Marian Way and Collin Street, a sign directs us to the Castle and Wollaton Hall - with odd effect, since, in this city of non-castellated castle and echoes-of-the-age-of-chivalry Elizabethan hall, the castle logo (very medieval, naturally) is more like our turreted Hall, and the hall logo (of classical design) is more like our renaissance Castle.

"The Surreal City of Nottingham" - now *there's* a promising theme. ■